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ABSTRACT

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights report, "A Better Chance to Learn: Bilingual Bicultural Education," is summarized from sociological, psychological, and anthropological perspectives to indicate its contribution to our understanding of the social, cultural, and intellectual aspects of education. This study summarizes significant facts from the report relating to immigration, language barriers, and the educational and learning difficulties of children from non-English speaking backgrounds. The paper outlines the recommendations of the report and concludes with a discussion of its policy implications. (DB)

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A BETTER CHANCE TO LEARN: BILINGUAL BICULTURAL EDUCATION

U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

A REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

by
S. Macpherson Pemberton

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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A REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

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This paper attempts a review and analysis of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights recent report, A Better Chance to Learn: Bilingual Bicultural Education. The report "examines the extent to which bilingual bicultural education is an effective educational approach for increasing the opportunity of language minority students." (p.3). The 254 page report has an introduction which comments on the impact of the decisions of Brown v. Board of Education 1954, and Lau v. Nichols, 1974. There are 3 chapters, the first discussing in historical context the early efforts at americanization, the second focussing on the English as a Second Language Approach, and the third emphasizing the educational principles underlying the bilingual approach.

There are two principal objectives in this analysis. One is an examination of the contribution of the report to our understanding of the social, cultural as well as the intellectual aspects of education. This involves viewing the report from various perspectives: sociological, psychological and anthropological. The other is an examination of the policy implications of the report. There would also be sections summarizing the significant facts and major recommendations of the report.

Significant Facts.

(1) The two factors which contributed to a major influx of Mexican immigrants

in the 1920's were a socially disruptive revolution in Mexico and the need for labor following agricultural development of the Southwest United States. (p.11).

(2) In the 1930's the main causes for poor attendance and poor performance at school among Mexican Americans were lack of English knowledge, low socio-economic status, and inaccurate measuring instruments. (p.15).

(3) No large scale effort was undertaken between 1920-1940 to alter the efforts of education of Mexican Americans, although there were scattered attempts to improve their general education. (p.15).

(4) The year 1970 saw the first expression of Executive policy in the area of equal educational opportunity with the issuing of the Department of HEW's May 25 Memorandum which required federally-funded school districts to provide assistance to language minority children. (p.20).

(5) Failure to weigh the rate and amount of language learning against the amount of retardation in subject matter and the overall psychological effect on the child has resulted in undermining the effectiveness of the ESL approach in meeting the needs of language minority students. (p.27).

(6) The building of self-concept is currently considered to be as important as the transmission of knowledge by curriculum developers (p.30). Many schools adversely affect the self-concepts of children (p.33).

(7) The school as an agent of socialization transmits ethnocentricity which is embedded in the socialization process of society. (p.36).

(8) All children, regardless of cultural background, experience some cultural shock when they first begin school. (p.37).

(9) The development of intellectual processes is today considered more important than the accumulation of facts. (p.41).

(10) Most of the studies concluding that bilingualism negatively affects a child's educational potential failed to give adequate consideration to language dominance and fluency. Part of the problem of the inaccuracy of such studies is the lack of agreement on the use of the term "bilingual" (p.64).

(11) Invalid interpretation of test results is largely traceable to lack of awareness of the effects of socio-economic status (p.68).

(12) It is highly possible for children to learn successfully through the medium of a second language notwithstanding the fact that the learning task is increased (p. 69).

(13) Funds appropriated under the Bilingual Education Act have been supporting demonstration programs rather than identifying and developing the best methods for teaching children of limited English speaking ability (p.84).

(14) Bilingual bicultural education has two major elements. First cognitive areas are introduced to language minority children until they have developed competency in English. Second, formal language instruction in both languages is provided (p. 88).

(15) Consideration of teachers for bilingual bicultural programs would cover their motives for teaching, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, competency in teaching in two languages, and knowledge of specific subject matter. (p.93).

Historical Context.

The first chapter of the report presents an historical overview of language minorities and education, before 1920 and after. It traces the historical developments associated with efforts to educate the large numbers of immigrants which came from Italy, Asia, Austria, Hungary, Russia, and the Balkans between 1850 and 1900, and the changes in the americanization process from that time till today.

This historical discussion is very important to our understanding of the problems of language minority groups today. Note that "identified as outcasts early language minority groups experienced hostility and open discrimination." (p.6). The Americanization movement in effect meant "melting" the overwhelming numbers of immigrants into American society by teaching them English. (p.7). These efforts focused on adult immigrants.

The first years of the twentieth century saw the children of immigrants suffer higher truancy and dropout rates and lower achievement levels, than children of non-immigrants. (p.8). This situation continued well into the twentieth century even though the classes of immigrants were not the same. The 1966 Coleman Report revealed that the academic achievement scores for language minority groups were significantly lower than those for majority groups. (p.18). Another historical parallel is shown by the fact that in the early twentieth century the children of Jewish and Italian parents received no special consideration in school (p.8) and in fact were made to feel inferior (p.9) in a way similar to the experiences of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans later in the century.

The historical comparison between studies on bilingualism of the 1920's and those of today is very fundamental to our understanding of the effects

of monolingualism and bilingualism on the education of children. Studies of the 1920's tended to favor the monolingual school. The report questions the reliability of those studies on account of the failure to consider such factors as the language-competency of the child, socio-economic status, and culturally-biased tests. (p.63). The report goes further, pointing to the fact that the past theory that language minority children learn more English in a monolingual school than in a bilingual bicultural program has been disaproved by a recent experimental study in Chicago which dramatized the positive effects of developing expression in the native language (p.75).

A knowledge of history helps to provide us with the reasons for past failures, thereby giving us the opportunity to turn those failures into successes. The report points to other reasons for the unreliability of past studies with their consequent failures to enlighten our understanding of the bilingual bicultural problem. Many of these, the report stated, suffered from methodological short-comings (p.63). Many others which concluded that bilingualism has a negative effect on the child's educational potential did not adequately consider language dominance and fluency (p.64). Still others revealed a lack of consistent agreement on the use of the term "bilingual."

A study of history also helps us to note trends as well as keep abreast of changes and developments. The report indicates that the 1920's saw successful efforts to instruct school children in their native language only in such states as Arizona and New Mexico (p. 15, note 52). Earlier immigrant groups sought to establish native language schools for their children. (p.8). Such efforts grew and resulted in the growth of monolingual schools, i.e., there were even segregated schools for Spanish-speaking children. It is interesting to note that one of the recommendations of the First Regional

Conference on the Education of Spanish speaking people in the Southwest in 1946 called for an end to these monolingual Spanish schools, and greater efficiency in teaching English (p.16). This might well be considered an important milestone in the development of bilingual education, and one of the foundation pillars for the English as a second language approach.

Implicit in the brief historical overview are certain important aspects of historical analysis and synthesis such as cause and effect and the idea of historical necessity. "In 1920, inability to understand the language of instruction was recognized as the chief cause of these children's poor performance in school (p.9)." The idea of historical necessity is one of the profoundest ideas ever to come to man. This is the idea that what has happened in the past has not been merely actual but necessary. The report states that the need for providing assistance for immigrants seeking citizenship resulted in the creation of English language classes for workers (p.7). It should be noted that citizenship information was provided in pay envelopes in the native language of workers thereby laying the foundations for bilingual bicultural education.

Psychological Aspects.

Certain sections of the report involve discussions on both the cognitive and affective domains of educational psychology including self-concept attitudes, the use of tests, and factors in intellectual development. The report states that today cognitive growth or the development of intellectual processes is considered more important than the accumulation of facts (p.41). Consequently factors which facilitate intellectual development are receiving much greater weight in the school curriculum. Language development is considered one such factor.

The report suggests that there is a close relationship between language and thought. It points to the works of such scholars as Lavatelli who defines language as a "symptom of underlying thought" because it expresses and defines ideas, concepts and logic. (p.41). Other scholars believe that cognitive growth is facilitated when students are stimulated and trained to use language. (p.42). Still others advocate that learning, memory and the manipulation of complex concepts can be facilitated by an extensive vocabulary, and command of grammatical constructions (p.43). This is even more so when the native language is involved.

The need for the development of the native language as an aid to the acquisition of verbal skills is strongly emphasized in the report:

> Verbal skills are best developed in the language the child knows best. It is more efficient and psychologically healthier to develop fully the child's native language in building verbal ability. In providing language minority children with language arts programs based on their native language and culture, bilingual bicultural education ensures the same continuity in language development that native English speaking children experience in a monolingual English curriculum (p.46).

The report insists that bilingual bicultural education not only imparts English skills but rather that it covers all cognitive areas.

It should be noted that the report leans toward accepting the idea of greater interdependence between language and thought (p.42 footnote 128). This has implications for associationism which attempts to explain man's complicated higher-order mental experiences as resulting from combinations (or associations) of simpler mental elements. Associationism is seen in the examples given in the report, such as the boy's hat, or herbivorous mammals, which show that both vocabulary and the relationships among words are involved in understanding certain concepts: "The vocabulary items represent concepts, and the grammatical constructions represent the relationship (or association) of one concept to the other." (p.43).

Certain aspects of the report relate to the concept of structuralism, another broad division of psychology. Structuralism marked the beginning of the first systematic school of thought in psychology in the nineteenth century. Its subject matter is conscious experience and it involves the experimental investigation of the structure of consciousness. Responses on personality, attitude and other tests are introspective in nature. These involve a verbal report based on experience, and that experience is the important factor. The report warns that the cultural background of the child must be taken into consideration if testing is to be indicative of the child's intelligence or knowledge. "Although children might understand a particular word, if they have had little exposure or experience with the concept and the contexts that the word invokes, they still are at a decided disadvantage." (p.67).

A third branch of psychology which is touched upon in the report is functionalism. Functionalism is concerned with the operation and processes of conscious phenomena, rather than with their structure. Further, its primary interest is with the utility of purpose of mental processes. Mental

processes are looked upon as activities leading to practical consequences. The discussion on culture and learning in the report savors of functionalism. Note the statement that "the curricula of American schools are based on the principle that instruction begins with the experiences and capacities that children bring to school. Children learn by ordering and making sense out of that which is already familiar." (p.48). The implication for bilingual bicultural education is underscored by the statement, the Navajo child "will be stimulated to learn history of the United States if it includes the history of the Navajo Nation." (p.47).

Other aspects of psychology discussed in the report and which are essential for the success of bilingual bicultural programs include self-concept and attitude. Images of self-concept stem from interaction within the family first. "After the family the school plays the most decisive role in the development of self-concept. (p.30). Identification with others is important to the formation of self-concept. Hence, as the report observes, children can develop feelings of belonging, which schools may nurture by utilizing and developing the particular language and experiences which are part of a child's first sense of identity." (p.33). This will help prevent the formation of negative attitudes which can easily jeopardize second language learning (p.59).

Sociological Considerations.

Certain sections of the report reflect sociological perspectives on school systems as functioning social systems. First the view is reflected that educational relationships occur in the context of formal organizational setting, in which students, teachers, supervisors, principals and school superintendents interact toward the goal of educating childern. The report suggests various ways of achieving this goal such as by means of proper selection and training of teachers (p.93), the open classroom, and team teaching (p.92, note 228). Proper program structures with effective division of labor are essential. The report insists that program planners must be guided by a preliminary linguistic analysis of the variety of speech used by the children (p.112). The report also praises the degree of cooperation achieved in the Rock Point Navajo program through the participation of both students and teachers in the development of instruction materials (p.98).

The second sociological perspective derives from the fact that the classroom represents a miniature social system in which the fundamental work of the school goes on. The report emphasizes the importance of effective classroom groupings in bilingual bicultural education programs. Students in the same classroom are usually grouped according to their language proficiency and their grade level. Sometimes students who are dominant in the same language are grouped together across grade levels for second language instruction. (p.95). Several individual groups may even work at various levels of second language development in different parts of the same classroom (p.96).

The third sociological perspective is that the school, like all social organizations, is influenced by external factors. The report notes that a major purpose of bilingual bicultural programs is "to bridge the gap between

the child's home and school experiences." (p.98). This is very important since what goes on in the school is directly linked to the social structure and composition of the external environment. The report indicates that the degree of success of closing the gap between home and school depends "greatly on the extent to which parental and community participation is enlisted in design and implementation of the program." (p.98).

An observation of consequence in the report is that teachers' values, beliefs, attitudes and expectations have considerable influence on student's chances for success or failure, and that teachers serving as role models, influence the development of self-concept in the student (p.93). Sociological analysis has suggested that an individual's attitudes and behavior are strongly linked to those groups to which he belongs. The classroom teacher should therefore be able to help the child isolate group forces that constrain its behavior. It is no wonder, then, that the report warns that motives for teaching, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, competency in teaching two languages, and knowledge of specific subject matter constitute weighty considerations in selecting teachers for bilingual bicultural programs (p.93).

The importance of the effects of socioeconomic status on testing is well brought out in the report:

> Lack of awareness of the effects of socioeconomic status has resulted in invalid interpretation of test results..... It is likely that children taking biased tests would have scored higher if they had been tested in their dominant language and if the tests had not included information foreign to their cultural experience (p.68).

It should be specially noted that the socioeconomic bias of a test reinforces the language and cultural bias, thereby putting the test taker at a great disadvantage.

Anthropological Viewpoints.

Some aspects of the report reflect anthropological perspectives from the standpoint of the new interest in the character of human nature seen in the pursuit of studies in cultural history and cultural values. This new interest has strong implications for bilingual bicultural education. In such a program, the report observes, "the points of departure are the cultural values, cultural heritage and societal experiences of the children." (p.48).

The concept of transmission of culture is fundamental to any appraisal of the relation between anthropology and education. That concept encompasses not only what is taught and learned, but also the organization, pattern and processes of education in their social and cultural settings. The report notes that "ethnocentricity is embedded in the socialization process of society, and is transmitted by the school, an agent of that socialization." (p.36). This is sometimes reflected in historical inaccuracies of minority groups in textbooks.

The report suggests, however, that bilingual bicultural education is one of the best ways of trying to minimize the adverse effects of ethnocentric school curricula:

> Bilingual bicultural education can overcome the implicit ethnocentricity of the school curriculum, since the values, traditions, history and literature of the language of minority children's culture are an integral part of the curriculum and, thus, it strengthens instead of weakens the sense of pride for the language minority group. (p.37).

The report emphasizes a viewpoint that is central alike to anthropology and to education, that the self-perpetuating character of culture is demonstrated by the role of communication. Without this feature no culture has been known to exist. Language is a demonstration of the remarkable

capacity of the human race to guarantee continuity to its beliefs and practices. The report strongly ascribes to this view:

> A major aspect of bilingual bicultural education is inclusion in the curriculum of the child's historical, literary and cultural tranditions.... Native language teachers are usually utilized for instruction in the native language of the child and native English speaking teachers for instruction in English. (p.29).

The report can be said to reflect three major themes within a broad focus on cultural transmission in diverse cultural contexts. The first theme is the relationship between education in the early years of life and the special problems of adolescence. In this connection the report states that "bilingual bicultural programs begin with one or more classes of children in the early grades, since children build learning skills and concepts in their early years at school and can learn languages most easily through puberty." (p.85). Further, "if bilingual bicultural education should fulfill its promise to provide educational skills, knowledge and English proficiency, it can be a major step in helping to remove the barriers which currently exclude language minority groups from the American mainstream" (p.141).

The second theme is that of education in social environments marked by rapid culture change. The report refers to the school and home as social institutions as well as cultures. "For many language minority children, starting school is particularly difficult because home and school are not merely two different institutions, but also represent two different cultures." (p.37). Since the school as a culture undergoes changes from time to time the education of the language minority child must be adjusted accordingly.

The third theme reflected in the report is the relationship between social structure, education, and modal personality. The report stresses the

influence of the social environment on the development of attitude. "Children's self-concepts are formed by the image of self conveyed by others around them." (p.59). Further, "an assessment of external factors which influence language learning is as important as gathering information on language proficiency and attitudes" (p.118). The report points out the need for information on home conditions, and geographic aspects of communities as these can serve as indications of certain attitudes which can affect learning..

General Recommendations.

The following general recommendations for successful bilingual bicultural education programs are based on the effect of such programs on the learning environment.

1. ESL instruction should be incorporated within and be directly supportive of content instruction in English (p.27).

2. The ESL approach should be employed mainly in communities (1) where children receive enough exposure to English outside the school to function as native speakers in a relatively short period of time; and (2) where children can maintain pride in the native language and culture so that they can develop a positive attitude toward the learning of English. (p.28).

3. Instruction through English in cognitive areas should begin when the child can function in that language and experiences no academic handicap due to insufficient knowledge of the language (p.29).

4. The child's historical, literary and cultural traditions should be included in the curriculum for purposes of strengthening identity and sense of belonging and for making the instructional program easier to grasp (p.29).

5. Children should be encouraged to use and develop the language they know best. (p.44).

6. In a bilingual bicultural program reading should be taught in the child's native tongue if initial reading success is to be achieved (p.50). Initial reading in a second language should be taught only after the child has learned to speak and understand it (p.54).

7. The bilingual bicultural program structure should take into account the level of English language proficiency of the child at each stage of development (p.58).

8. Verbal abilities, reading and IQ should be measured in the dominant language or in the language that the child knows best (p.66). Language dominance should also be taken into account in measuring math and problem-solving skills. (p.67).

9. The cultural background of the child should be considered before testing can be truly indicative of the child's intelligence or knowledge. (p.67).

10. School communities which have high (over 40 percent) and moderate (between 10 and 39 percent) concentration of language minority individuals with low or moderate English language ability should receive bilingual bicultural education (p.82).

11. The major consideration in determining the number of years to be covered in any selected program should be the attainment of fluency in English (p.82).

12. Community advisory boards can serve as liaisons between the school program and parents and community members, and make contributions to the drafting of program proposals for funding.

13. A careful assessment of students' language skills, subject matter mastery and attitudes; the social factors which influence language development; and the available staff and material resources which can be utilized to implement the program should precede the designing of an appropriate bilingual bicultural education program (p.105).

14. The assessment of entry level skills and subject matter mastery should include consideration of the previous experiences of the child in both languages. (p.113).

15. Research should be conducted (1) to determine at what point children in bilingual bicultural programs can be expected to take state or nationally-normed standardized tests, which assume knowledge of English (p.131); (2) to increase knowledge about language development among language minority children living in bilingual environments (p.131); (3) to improve our understanding of second language acquisition (p.132); (4) to develop second language teaching methodology (p.133); (5) to add to our knowledge about whether children relate their second language directly to thought, or whether they go to their native language first and then to thought (p.134); (6) to examine the effects of bilingualism on cognition (p.136).

Policy Implications.

The Commission's report can be very useful to the following audiences: (a) Federal decision-makers within the Department of Health, Education and Welfare; (b) Congressional Committee members and staff responsible for authorization and appropriation of funds for bilingual bicultural education; (c) State Education Officials; (d) other influential bodies which have responsibility for determining educational policy, e.g., National Council on Pilingual Education, Association of Teachers, Administrators, etc.

One of the policy questions for Federal officials addressed by the report is "To what extent should the Federal government continue to appropriate bilingual education funds for demonstration projects rather than for identifying and developing the best methods for teaching language minority children?" (p.84). The report also identifies certain weaknesses in bilingual legislation such as the unclear nature of evaluations in the Bilingual Education Act of 1974. In these and other ways the report provides guidelines for future Federal bilingual program implementation (p.123).

Several factors associated with program effectiveness are discussed in the report and these carry implications for funding. One of these factors is pre program assessment of the available staff and materials among others before an appropriate bilingual bicultural program can be designed. (p.105). Such information can be very valuable to program planners in developing program goals, the content of native language arts courses, the quantity and type of formal ESL instruction, and the language to be used in teaching these subjects (pp.105-106).

By its close examination of operating characteristics of programs reviewed and furnishing useful information, the report is indeed sensitive to the needs

of decision-makers. Information on the basic design, instruction, teachers and training, student grouping etc., of successful bilingual bicultural programs in such cities as Philadelphia and San Francisco (pp.84-102) can be very helpful to program planners. The warning note that many programs lacked precise and uniform data on their overall effectiveness (p.103) should help program planners to avoid such pitfalls.

The identification of areas for further research also has important policy implications. The report notes that "research in second language teaching methodology will help bilingual curriculum developers devise teaching strategies which most effectively stimulate children to use the second language" (p.133). Too often important policy questions such as "Do 6-year old bilingual children possess two complete language systems and sets of vocabulary words with the same degree of sophistication in each that monolingual children possess in one?" are not answerable by existing research, and these are highlighted in the report (p.131).

Many facts and findings of the report have straight forward but important policy relevance in contributing to the formulation of criteria for program design, implementation, funding etc., at Federal and State levels of decision-making. Important questions such as age-range of children for which bilingual bicultural education is more or less effective (p.85), experiences of teachers with bilingual bicultural instruction (p.93), student grouping (p.95), curriculum content and materials (p.96), are areas of findings in the report which would be helpful to policy-makers in targeting programs at certain grade levels, or targeting funds for teacher-training. The potential policy implication of such program variables is the potential significant contribution to program specifications.

The report's insistence on the need for pre program assessment of attitudes also has strong policy implications. It warns that planning should include an examination of negative attitudes within the school and community (p.117), for "negative attitudes may be exemplified in policies which disparage the use of the native language in the school or in other local institutions." (p.117). It continues:

> Bilingual program planners need such assessment to identify areas in which changes should be made for successful program implementation. Moreover such assessment can suggest activities such as workshops or cross-cultural events needed to improve attitudes of the language groups toward each other (p.117).

Issues of cost effectiveness as it relates to successful programs are also addressed by the report. Suggestions are made which would affect program costs, such as utilizing language minority and bilingual staff already employed by a school district to implement new programs following their training in bilingual bicultural teaching (p.119). Existing training funds can be used in the preparation of teachers and principals for new programs. (p.120). Bilingual bicultural programs should be supported by the funds currently used for Federal, State and Local education programs. (p.120). The report calls upon the states to drop their complaints that bilingual bicultural education programs involve huge monetary costs for designing and implementing them, purchasing special educational materials, and training administrators and faculty. States should consider these costs as an investment, rather than use them to support their claim to monolingual education (p.165).

That the report looks with less favor on state claims to monolingual education and endorses bilingual bicultural education is quite clear. It is to be hoped that the report will have some positive influence on state policies toward bilingual bicultural education.